

VZCZCXR06168

RR RUEHHM RUEHLN RUEHMA RUEHPB RUEHPOD

DE RUEHMO #3316/01 1900240

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

R 090240Z JUL 07

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1888

INFO RUEHZN/EST COLLECTIVE

RUEAEPA/HQ EPA WASHDC

RUEHYG/AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG 2535

RUEHVK/AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK 2235

RUEHLN/AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG 4281

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 003316

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR OES/ENV, EUR/RUS and EUR/PGI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTALISTS FRET OVER SOCHI OLYMPIAD

REF: MOSCOW 1919

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¶11. SUMMARY. The selection of Sochi as the site of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games brought less joy to Russian environmentalists, who have long warned about the potential impact of large-scale construction in this region. Environmental NGOs will monitor implementation of the Sochi 2014 Environmental Plan outlined in the Bid's Candidature File. END SUMMARY.

¶12. Most of Russia is rejoicing over the successful Olympic bid to host the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi. Located on the Black Sea, with the Western Caucasus Mountains as a backdrop, Sochi is a resort city known for its unique environmental splendor. Environmental concerns about the effect on the nearby national reserve (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), a national park, and the surrounding buffer zones have abounded since Sochi was short-listed for the games. In the lead up to the OIC discussion, Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, and other NGOs had highlighted the potential environmental impact caused by the pending massive construction. Despite the current festivities in Sochi, some Russians were dismayed -- particularly environmentalists who worry the large scale construction of sports facilities in the mountains and along the Black Sea coast will cause severe damage to delicate ecosystems.

¶13. Prior to the official announcement, Greenpeace and other environmental watch-groups had expressed concerns over Sochi as an Olympic hopeful. Environmental groups said they hoped to minimize the impact of the Games on the local flora and fauna. Additionally, there were concerns over energy consumption, water use, waste treatment, and traffic emissions. World Wildlife Fund (WWF) said it was worried about the future of one of the most valuable nature areas of the Sochi national park, the Grushevaya Polyana, the projected site of the bobsled and luge track routes and other sports facilities. Construction of these facilities will inevitably lead to forest logging and destruction of habitats of endangered species and unique flora and fauna of the national park, according to statements posted on the WWF website.

¶14. With the Olympic bid, the NGO community called for caution concerning the environment in the region. Environmental NGOs also said they fear that facilities at the Olympic village will disrupt the traditional feeding and migration grounds of the brown bear and red deer, and could also cause the destruction of rare flowers and plants. The World Wildlife Fund requested that new protected areas be created to compensate for the increasing human pressure on the unique region's nature landscapes.

¶15. According to the Sochi 2014 Environmental Plan outlined in the Bid's Candidature File, its three main action areas are inclusiveness, environmental consciousness, and economic viability.

The Sochi Olympic Development Committee listed these conservation goals:

- construction of a thermal power station;
- redevelopment of the surrounding area maintaining a balance between natural and urban landscape;
- use of environmentally friendly and recycled materials and renewable energy sources; construction
- use of vegetation on walls, roofs, attics, and balconies to improve air and water quality and reduce energy consumption;
- upgrade and redesign of power substations and lines.

¶6. In addition to environmentally friendly construction procedures, there are plans to address the natural environment by:

- preserving the original land surface;
- creating and enhancing animal habitats;
- rehabilitating the ecology in disturbed urban areas;
- developing environmental assessments and zoning improvements;
- holding public hearings to encourage transparency in development activities.

Sochi is also planning on opening 20 natural gas stations to greatly reduce car emissions in the region.

¶7. In Sochi they celebrated with early morning fireworks when the IOC announcement was made at 5 a.m. local time. Developing the region and upgrading Sochi to a world class resort is a federal priority. The government had already planned to sink \$12 billion into the region with \$7 billion from the federal budget and an additional \$5 billion from private sources. Despite holding 293 medals, Russia has never hosted the Winter Games and bringing the 2014 Winter Olympics to Sochi is a great point of pride for President Putin. A skier himself, and someone who stresses the importance of a healthy lifestyle, Putin clearly views the legacy of a permanent winter sports training center in the region as additional lustre.

¶8. With the Winter Olympics now a reality, Sochi officials will

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begin to set their Environmental Plan in motion. The host city will certainly benefit from increased employment opportunities, urban development and improved infrastructure and a high-value commercial real estate market. Steady implementation of the environmental plan's milestones will be key to assuaging the fears of environmental groups.

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